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# PROFILES OF THE REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL LABORATORIES

# BUILDING HIGH PERFORMING LEARNING COMMUNITIES

**2001**

**U.S. Department of Education**
**Office of Educational Research and Improvement**

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August 2001

# Foreword

As we enter the 21st century, we realize more than ever that our nation's vitality and continued strength rests on the shoulders of our children, and that we can provide them with a sound footing to meet that future by providing a high quality education. Many students are already receiving such an education; we read about the increasing availability of advanced placement courses and international baccalaureate programs. Often, these students attend schools amply provided with resources most predictive of high quality—well-prepared, experienced teachers, effective administrative and support staff, safe and healthy learning environments, up to date textbooks, well-stocked media centers, and access to technology.

But what is the nature of the education being provided to students in other schools across America? States have begun identifying low-performing schools; a recent estimate puts the number at 10,000. What do we know about such schools? We know only that these schools post lower than desirable (according to performance standards) student achievement results year after year after year. We know that these schools do not possess some or all of the resources predictive of high performance. We know that students attending these schools often face challenges in their lives—at home, in their communities—that can affect the manner in which they learn. But, most importantly, we also know that every student can achieve and that we cannot fail these students, or the staff in the schools they attend, or the communities whose children and schools these are.

## Background on the Regional Educational Laboratories

The Regional Educational Laboratory Program, administered by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, is the U.S. Department of Education's largest research and development investment designed to help educators, policymakers, and communities improve schools; its statutory mission is "to promote knowledge-based school improvement to help all students meet high standards and to help the nation meet the National Education Goals" (Public Law 103–227, enacted in 1994). Since their establishment in 1965, the Regional Educational Laboratories have been conducting high quality, useful, cutting-edge research, or preparing summaries and syntheses of research to inform the educational policy and practice. Laboratories have also, in partnership with schools, districts, and states, been developing, field testing, and refining processes, strategies, and tools designed to solve difficult and pressing educational problems.

The Laboratories' knowledge of their regions and ties to national networks, their understanding of the informational needs of policymakers and educators, and their involvement in the field enable them to link the worlds of research, policy, and practice. The products and services developed by Laboratories have helped schools, districts, and state education agencies take advantage of the latest and best research and proven practices to improve schools. Program indicator data for Fiscal Year 2000 contain a few key statistics regarding the contributions of the Laboratories to educational improvement:

- products supplied to 1,635,492 clients;
- direct services provided to 127,162 clients;
- hits on Web sites totaling 35,828,628; and
- intensive research and development work with 630 school, district, or state sites that involved 545,612 students; 34,923 teachers; 5,029 administrators; and 13,024 parents.

# Work of the Regional Educational Laboratories

This handbook includes a brief description of each of the 10 Laboratories to acquaint you with Laboratories' past accomplishments, current work under the 2000–05 contract period, and upcoming events. More extensive information about Laboratories' programs of work and products are provided on their Web sites, several of which have won national awards for content and design. Those Web addresses, as well as other contact information, are included in this handbook. You are also welcome to contact the U.S. Department of Education's program officers (included in the contact information) for further information about the Regional Educational Laboratory Program.

In 2000, a competition was held resulting in the award of new 5-year contracts under the Regional Educational Laboratory Program. The Request for Proposal (RFP) articulated the following general purpose that constitutes the context for all proposed work:

> To *advance the procedural knowledge ("know how" based on rigorous research and expert practice) about transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities (communities that successfully organize or develop the values, beliefs, and technical skills of its members to help students achieve at high levels); and to promote the use of that procedural knowledge in policy and practice to help increase the number of high-performing learning communities.*

The RFP also established the following 10 principles meant to characterize all proposed work:

- *based on high priority regional needs;*
- *focused on well-defined problems;*
- *built upon existing knowledge coming from the research and practice communities;*
- *designed with attention to rigorous standards of quality related to the conduct of work and the quality of all resulting products;*
- *conducted with special attention to the needs of rural areas as required by statute;*
- *attentive to students most at risk of failure due to barriers of language, culture, or poverty;*
- *characterized by appropriate use of both widely used and emerging technologies;*
- *noted for extensive use of partnerships and networks across a wide spectrum of organizations at local, state, regional, and national levels;*
- *designed to forge a stronger Laboratory system, including encouragement to make wider use of strategies, products, and services created by other Laboratories; and*
- *noted for its impact on policy, procedure, and practice within its region and, in certain circumstances, across the nation.*

Laboratories have proposed a 5-year plan for work designed to meet the purpose of transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities and adhere to the principles for Laboratory work by:

## Addressing Critical Problems in their Region

Schools face critical problems that make it difficult for all students to learn to high levels of achievement. Schools and school districts also have difficulty finding and using the informational resources they need to create high-performing learning communities, and will continue to fall even farther behind if the knowledge base is not expanded and

information is not widely disseminated. Guided by governing boards that represent the constituents in the regions, including teachers, researchers, and high-level policymakers, the Laboratories will use rigorous applied educational research practices to assist in solving site-specific problems and use those experiences to develop generalizable solutions.

### Serving as a National Leader

Each Laboratory is taking a leadership role in a significant education issue area that can make a contribution to the procedural knowledge required to build high-performing learning communities. Leadership work includes synthesizing research-based information, disseminating the information, and applying the information in ways that transform policy and practice. The National Leadership Areas include: Assessment of Educational Achievement, Curriculum and Instruction Related to Reading and Language Mastery, Educational Leadership, Educational Technology, Expanded Learning Opportunities, Family and Community Involvement, Re-engineering Schools for Improvement, Standards-Based Educational Practice, and Teaching Diverse Students.

### Serving as Part of a Laboratory Network Program

Each Laboratory is participating in collaborative activities with other Laboratories to optimize the uses of Laboratory resources, create nationwide resource collections, and apply experience across the Laboratory network to specific problems.

## Contact Information

For more information about the Regional Educational Laboratory program please contact:

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Or visit:

**Regional Educational Laboratory Network Web Site:** maintained by the Laboratories and contains highlights of their activities, entry to each Laboratory's Web Site, and a place to search and request Laboratory publications (http://www.relnetwork.org).

**U.S. Department of Education Laboratory Program Web Site:** maintained by the U.S. Department of Education. It provides information about Laboratory program events and publications, and links to other Laboratory Sites (http://www.ed.gov/prog_info/Labs).

# Contents

# The Regional Educational Laboratory at AEL Inc.

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## Mission

*AEL is a catalyst for schools and communities to build lifelong learning systems that harness resources, research, and practical wisdom.* To contribute knowledge that assists low-performing schools to move toward continuous improvement, AEL conducts research, development, evaluation, and dissemination activities that inform policy, affect educational practice, and contribute to the theoretical and procedural knowledge bases on effective teaching, learning, and schooling. Strategies build on research and reflect a commitment to empowering individuals and building local capacity.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

AEL's work is integrated by focusing all work on four constituent-identified areas of need relative to low-performing schools and the contexts within which they operate: developing school capacity, improving teaching quality, promoting school-community connections, and providing policy-relevant information services.

**Developing school capacity** (staff contact: Sandra Orletsky). A central problem confronting low-performing schools is their lack of capacity to envision, plan, implement, and sustain changes that could transform them to high-performing learning communities. AEL views school capacity as incorporating the level of knowledge, skills, and dispositions possessed by school leadership and staff; the strength of the school's professional community; and the coherence of the total school program. AEL's strategy for building school capacity within the region is to develop, test, and refine an effective model for providing intensive assistance. This will be accomplished with the help of experts on low-performing schools, researchers on school change in rural and minority communities, and experts on collaborative action research. These experts will be convened and consulted in collaboration with Andy Hargreaves of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, Canada. AEL will assess and refine its assistance model as it works in intensive sites collaboratively selected with the region's chief state school officers.

**Improving teaching quality** (staff contact: Jim Craig). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reports that higher and more rigorous accountability standards do not appear to result in improved student outcomes absent attention to issues of teaching quality. In approaching this issue, AEL does not equate *teaching quality* with *teacher quality*, but defines its work in terms of individual and organizational factors that support or enable individual teachers to be highly effective,

particularly in low-performing schools. Strategies for developing teaching quality are designed to provide information to enhance policy and practice at all levels of the system, including K–12 and higher education. These strategies include supporting a regional database of information relevant to teaching quality, investigating ways that identification of individual strengths can be used as tools for teacher development, examining the effectiveness of a high school-higher education collaborative model (supported by technology and research) in promoting teaching quality specific to work with disengaged students, engaging in collaborative research on teaching quality, and using resulting information in the reform of teacher educator development and practice. Fifteen institutions of higher education constituting the AEL/Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) Co-Venture are participating in the research.

**Promoting school-community connections** (staff contact: Ray Thornton). School-community partnerships are particularly necessary in the region served by AEL, which is predominantly rural and where schools often represent the single highest concentration of resources. AEL's strategies for promoting school-community connections are to work with schools and communities to enhance proactive community relations so that the community develops increasing ownership for its schools and becomes more accountable for student and school performance; document what is working in effective school-community partnerships; and work with participants to codify their procedures, giving special attention to how the resources of the community are used for engaging student learning. Intensive sites for developing proactive community relations—at least one in each state—will be identified by each chief state school officer. AEL will also work with members of the faith community in Charleston, West Virginia, to identify strategies they have found effective in fostering development of the whole child, including academic performance.

**Providing policy-relevant information services** (staff contact: Pamela Lutz). While improvements in school and student performance are achieved at the local and individual levels, the conditions that support or hinder those improvements are often found in the systems and structures of state policy. AEL delivers to state policymakers research and development-based information that honors their state context and enhances capacity to create and sustain high-performing institutions for teaching and learning. To increase policymaker access to and use of timely, focused information in policy decisionmaking, AEL employs face-to-face, print, and electronic formats to convene role-alike groups, report state-specific data whenever possible, and provide policy analysis and interpretation around specific issues such as rural sustainability and research on improving low-performing schools. Partners include the Commonwealth Educational Policy Institute at Virginia Commonwealth University, Dr. Stephen Ross of the Center for Research in Educational Policy at the University of Memphis, and the National Rural Education Association.

## National Leadership Area

**Educational technology** (staff contact: Tammy McGraw). Since 1995, the United States has made a considerable investment in educational technology and its use in the classroom; estimates of combined federal and other funding total more than a billion dollars. Yet recent improvements in school technology will be wasted if teachers and school leaders are not prepared to use new tools effectively. AEL has identified five goals for promoting effective use of educational technology:

Goal 1: Explore innovative ways that current and emerging technologies can be used to address specific education problems, particularly as they relate to disadvantaged and underserved populations. AEL, Inc. recently established the Institute for the Advancement of Emerging Technologies in Education (IAETE) to integrate the organization's efforts.

Goal 2: Design and develop high-quality research-based products and services to address the documented needs of low-performing learning communities. Recent products include *Principal Connections,* an interactive CD-ROM and companion Web site that help school principals build technology leadership skills; and *Distance Based and Distributed Learning: A Decision Tool for Education Leaders.*

Goal 3: Maintain a collection of the most relevant research related to educational technology and its use. To guide this work, a panel of distinguished advisors with diverse expertise will be convened annually, to include Chris Dede of Harvard University and Mark Schlager of Stanford University, among others.

Goal 4: Collect and disseminate promising practices and exemplary strategies from throughout the United States and beyond. As demonstrated in *Patterns of Promise,* AEL products are designed to help schools understand the discrete elements necessary for replication in other settings.

Goal 5: Facilitate communication and resource sharing throughout the regional educational laboratory network. AEL is developing an electronic environment that will support the collection, organization, and dissemination of research, artifacts, media objects, and procedural knowledge.

## Key Accomplishments

AEL is continuing two strands of work that have proven effective in improving low-performing schools: partnering with state departments of education and school districts to identify/develop effective processes and practices, and developing and testing tools for aligning curricula, instruction, and assessment with state standards.

**Partnering with state departments of education to identify/develop effective processes and practices.** AEL has developed and tested a process for working with state departments of education to improve the status, including student achievement, of low-performing schools and school districts. The processes include engaging school and community members in developing a vision and action plan for improvement and delivering professional development that targets challenges at the school and classroom levels. Test scores improved in the pilot district, which resulted in the district's removal from probationary status.

**Developing and testing tools for aligning curricula and instruction with state standards.** Through additional pilot sites, AEL will continue refinement and development of tools that can be used by educators to improve school and district performance. Early data indicate increases in student achievement and community involvement.

## Upcoming Products and Events

*Colloquium on inquiry and improvement in low-performing schools.* AEL, in collaboration with Andy Hargreaves and Amanda Datnow from the International Center for Educational Change, will sponsor a colloquium involving researchers from the United States, Canada, and England, as well as the chief state school officers from each of AEL's states. Its purpose is to lay the groundwork for a continuing and collaborative research agenda around issues of sustainable school reform *(Summer 2001, Arlington, Virginia).*

*TransFormation,* a new research briefing, will communicate the latest policy-related implications from research on improvement in low-performing schools. The publication's editor is Dr. Stephen M. Ross, director of the Center for Research in Educational Policy at the University of Memphis. To request a subscription, or to access the briefings online, contact AEL at **http://www.ael.org/transform/index.htm** *(two issues per year).*

# Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University

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## Mission

The LAB promotes educational change that provides equitable opportunities for all students to succeed. We advocate for populations whose access to excellent education historically has been limited or denied.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

The work of the LAB is organized into three program areas: Student-Centered Learning, Teacher Development, and Collaborative Leadership. Problems underlying each program area and the focus of work in each area are briefly described below.

**Student-centered learning** (staff contact: Joseph DiMartino). The disengagement of many secondary school youth interferes with their school performance. Many high school students, especially those living in poverty, perform poorly on state standardized assessments, dropout of school at high rates, and leave school ill prepared for either further education or the workforce. In many high schools in both urban and rural areas, outdated programs, curriculum, and instruction are ill suited to changing demographic and economic realities. Most American high schools have not been able to adapt to social changes and demands for accountability. They have historically resisted change rather than embracing it. At the heart of these challenges is the failure to adapt the institutional environment to the individual learning needs of adolescent students.

The LAB will address this problem by creating more student-centered structures, models, and practices that result in a reduction in the disengagement of secondary school youth. We will investigate the effects of a major national model for transforming urban high schools, collect and share information from research and practice on personalization of student learning, and collect and share information from research and practice on content area, literacy instruction for secondary students. This will be accomplished with the help of personalization researcher John Clarke and literacy expert Julie Meltzer, among others. In addition, the LAB will work with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, an accreditation body, and with the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Researchers, practitioners, and others will be convened to develop a

personalization rubric to measure the extent to which schools have student-centered practices in place.

**Teacher development** (staff contact: Charlene Heintz). Teacher development has received insufficient attention relative to the volume and pace of education reform. It rarely takes into account the challenging subject matter, the demands of statewide assessments, the need for literacy development across grades, and the need to connect to schools' overall vision for student success. Much of it is short-term. To increase student learning in low-performing schools, we must help schools and teachers create strategic, long-term, inquiry-based professional development opportunities that are part of teachers' day-to-day culture. We must design and sustain working environments that foster creative thinking and risk-taking.

The LAB's program of work in this area is designed to identify the barriers to conducting teacher development in an inquiry-based, collaborative environment. We will examine the policies, interventions, and procedures needed to support teacher opportunities for continuous improvement. The work is organized into four major activities: structuring the collaborative design and implementation of school-wide, outcomes-based teacher development plans; creating online teacher development capacities to deliver and support teacher learning; connecting teacher practice to how students develop subject-based literacy and comprehension in academic disciplines; and using statewide assessments to inform practice and improve literacy in low-performing schools. Partners in this work include state departments of education throughout our region; local boards of education; district teacher unions; the Center for the Enhancement of Science and Mathematics Education (CESAME); and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL).

**Collaborative leadership** (staff contact: John Correiro). Standards-driven and accountability-focused reform, coupled with the increased attention to underperforming schools in our region, has increased the pressure on leadership at all levels of the educational system. Policymakers agree that a "leadership problem"—shortages of leaders, increased expectations for leaders, and ineffective professional development of leaders in education—affects high-poverty settings and districts where large-scale improvement has not taken hold. For active, collaborative leadership to take hold among teachers, principals, central office personnel, school boards, and parents—all who seek to play leadership roles need new knowledge, skills, and attitudes. They also need to work together over time to understand issues and concerns, plan, and cooperate.

The LAB will address its region's educational leadership challenges by partnering with Connecticut to study and support schools identified as low performing, and by working with a regional support system center in Rochester, New York, to study and advance that state's support network. The LAB will also facilitate shared inquiry with teams of leaders working in urban settings. In addition, the LAB will expand its successful work with leadership networks—the Superintendents' Leadership Council, the Principals' Leadership Network (partnering with National Association for Elementary School Principal and National Association for Secondary School Principals), regional leadership teams consisting of representatives from secondary and postsecondary institutions (in a project led by our partner Jobs for the Future), and regional State Education Agency (SEA) policy seminars.

## National Leadership Area

**Teaching diverse students** (staff contact: Maria Pacheco). Through the Education Alliance's Center for Equity and Diversity and its national advisory panel, the LAB will pursue three

programmatic strategies in addressing its national leadership area on teaching diverse students. These strategies are summarized below:

- Identify and synthesize studies on teaching diverse learners including those that integrate research on human development, culture and language; culturally responsive pedagogy; exemplary program models and practices; assessment policy; and teacher recruitment, retention, and development. These syntheses will advance the procedural knowledge regarding effective practices and policies at local, regional and national levels, especially in terms of its application in the context of low-performing schools.
- Establish a national academy for cultural and linguistic diversity to encourage discussions across role groups on key issues for the teaching of diverse learners. In addition, provide professional development and support to existing and aspiring teachers and administrators who work with diverse learners, promote greater diversity among teachers and educational leaders, and communicate the results of national research studies to educational leaders.

- Develop and disseminate information to ensure widespread distribution of research results, promising models, and effective practices among educational practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and members of the community.

## Key Accomplishments

**Student-centered learning.** The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) affects 700 high schools (95 percent of the public high schools in New England). In the past, the LAB conducted a 3-year study of the accreditation process of the Commission on Public Secondary Schools of NEASC. This study provided the research support and technical assistance needed by NEASC as it developed the new standards and procedures for accreditation, which were adopted for implementation in January 2000.

When NEASC substantially revised its accreditation process, it significantly increased the regional focus on standards, quality of instruction, and student-centered learning environments. High schools in New England must now demonstrate that they support all students in meeting the same high standards of academic, civic, and social achievement. Each year, NEASC will visit 70 schools, and the LAB will provide technical assistance in analyzing the information gathered. In addition, the LAB will conduct regional conferences to assist high schools facing an accreditation review.

**Northeast Superintendents' Leadership Council.** The LAB has a history of developing long-term partnerships with groups of educational leaders. The Northeast Superintendents' Leadership Council (SLC), an organization of superintendents that promotes equity and excellence in American schools, was founded in 1989 by the Education Alliance at Brown University. Considered a model for organizations promoting development of educational leaders, the SLC has advanced its work through a variety of studies and targeted projects, and most notably through its annual leadership institutes. The SLC's success has led the LAB to further develop and support leadership networks and activities that serve principals (Principals' Leadership Network), and state education agencies (SEA policy seminars). In addition to helping committed educational leaders develop their knowledge, skills, and collegial support, the LAB's work with leadership networks provides an ongoing source of insight into emerging issues in regional education and an important pathway for developing and sharing knowledge.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**Keep Talking**, a discussion guide, offers school leaders a tool for engaging families and communities in school reform. For 3 years, the LAB has studied family partnerships in several New England schools. Based on its study, the LAB has developed a five-part conversation guide that will help school principals facilitate discussions about family partnerships. It is designed to encourage teachers, parents, and administrators to talk about family and community partnerships in a different way *(Summer 2001)*.

**Diversity kit** will help teachers learn about culturally responsive classroom practice. The kit will include a tool for personal and professional inquiry by providing both current research and relevant examples that lead teachers to reflect, discuss, and revise their classroom practice *(Winter 2001)*.

**Education Notes** will include short articles—updates on major events, commentary on current issues in education reform, descriptions of recent publications and valuable online resources, and brief summaries of crucial issues in educational research. Issues planned for this year will deal with collaborative models of educational leadership, secondary-school reform, and equity and diversity *(three issues per year: Summer/Fall, Fall, Winter)*.

**First Annual Conference on Teaching Diverse Learners.** LAB will host this conference as part of its National Leadership Center work. Through a variety of activities—keynote addresses, individual and panel presentations, videos, and brainstorming sessions—participants will engage with researchers and practitioners in discussions about effective, research-based practices designed to meet the needs of English language learners *(Summer 2001, Providence, Rhode Island)*.

**Second Annual Northeast Principals' Summit.** The Summit is sponsored by the Principals' Leadership Network, a regional consortium of K–12 principals supported by the Education Alliance and LAB at Brown University, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the American Federation of School Administrators. Together, this partnership is collecting data, developing action research projects in the field, and publishing results in user-friendly formats around selected issues of regional and national significance to school principals *(Fall 2001, location to be announced)*.

# Laboratory for Student Success

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## Mission

The primary mission of the Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is to bring about lasting improvements in the learning of the mid-Atlantic region's increasingly diverse student population. The ultimate goal of LSS is to establish a system of research, development, and dissemination that connects schools, parents, community agencies, professional groups, and higher education institutions; gradually expands improvement efforts in the region to transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities; and is part of a national system of information exchange.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

LSS's scope of work focuses on a coordinated and integrated approach that affects several areas from the classroom to the statehouse. Four key problem areas to be addressed include: improving teacher quality; building and sustaining comprehensive school improvement; developing school-family-community connections; and integrating technology as a catalyst for high-performing learning communities.

**Improving teacher quality** (staff contact: Frederick McCoy). Teacher quality and supply is one of the largest barriers to successful implementation of educational improvement initiatives in the five mid-Atlantic states. The intense relationship between teacher quality and student achievement becomes clear when addressing the "capacity" concerns of transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. Three key areas of LSS's work in this area include: re-engineering schools and colleges of education to increase the region's capacity to improve learning, both for children at rural and urban schools and for preservice teachers; developing a regional database that will detail the similarities and differences between states with regard to licensing, recruitment, and certification practices; and formulating policies that will support an intensive common approach to these issues. This work will be accomplished through the leadership and collaborative efforts of LSS, the Mid-Atlantic Deans and Superintendents Network, the Council for Basic Education, and the Maryland State Department of Education.

**Building and sustaining comprehensive school improvement** (staff contact: Roy Dawson). The work in this area advances the knowledge base needed to transform low-performing schools into high-

performing learning communities. The following design principles guide LSS projects that address this critical area: resilience research, both on individuals (e.g., students and teachers) and institutions; collaboration with "strategic partners" to provide information and technical assistance for informed decisionmaking and planning for implementation to meet reform needs; and networking to contribute directly to capacity building at all levels to ensure student success in meeting state and local standards, and utilize the procedural knowledge to scale up school reform efforts focusing particularly on low-performing schools with a high concentration of students from educationally and economically disadvantaged rural and urban communities. An alliance of groups including a network of universities led by Fairleigh Dickinson University, the Public Sector Labor Management Committee, and Educational Research Service are participating in this work.

**Developing school-family-community connections** (staff contact: Ron Taylor). The emerging structures in many communities that closely link the work of schools, parents, and community agencies will become increasingly important in the years ahead. Problems of many children and families transcend the capacity of the school or any single agency to serve them effectively. Their problems are often very deep, tied to issues of economic disinvestments and joblessness in whole neighborhoods, and of child abuse and neglect in individual homes. Schools can only succeed to the extent that broader community efforts in health, economics, and safety also succeed. The very process of bridging as it occurs in communities, schools, universities, and elsewhere, and making the most of the resulting connections will be a key area of study at LSS. Collaborators in this work include the Academic Development Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago, and Pennsylvania State University.

**Integrating technology as a catalyst for high-performing learning communities** (staff contact: Johann Sarmiento). The work in this area is designed to generate new opportunities to critically analyze and advance procedural knowledge concerning why, when, and how technologies can support, enhance, and transform teaching, learning, and the leadership of educational organizations. The Advanced Technologies for Learning (ATL) Lab at LSS serves as an in-house and regional interdisciplinary think-tank for effective integration of advanced technologies and educational initiatives. Broadly stated, four goals guide ATL work: foster the innovative and effective integration of digital technologies into K–12 teaching and learning; support informed decisionmaking on the part of regional K–12 educators, schools, districts, and state-level educational agencies in selecting, using, maintaining, and evaluating educational technologies; provide innovative sustained professional development activities for and with teachers, technology coordinators, administrators, and other educators; and create and sustain networks and repositories of shared expertise and material resources within the region. Collaborators in this area include the Network of Technology Demonstration Schools, the Learning Technology Support Group of the School District of Philadelphia, a selected group of Educational Technology Training Centers in New Jersey and Intermediate Units in Pennsylvania, as well as the Mid-Atlantic Regional Technology in Education Consortium and its State Officers Network.

## National Leadership Area

**Educational leadership** (staff contact: Roy Dawson). As the lead Regional Educational Laboratory for educational leadership, LSS has identified three focus areas that will result in a program of cross-disciplinary applied research, development, and dissemination activities.

First, educational leadership requires capacity building at all levels to promote student learning and higher performance. LSS aims to advance procedural "know how," but focuses on providing

technical assistance and evaluation support at the state and district level to develop policy initiatives, refine existing practices, and assess the impact of reform on teaching and learning. At the school-site level, the work of the LSS Services to the Field unit will greatly expand the knowledge-based professional development and outreach program in the region and nationally.

Secondly, widespread consensus on outcome-based accountability has created new challenges for educational leadership. Policymakers and practitioners have yet to agree on a common strategy to transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. LSS focuses on leadership development through principals and small learning communities that focus on content knowledge and pedagogy that promote student-learning success. These advances include the use of best practices in curriculum and instruction from early childhood through high school; broadening parental and community engagement to foster a supportive learning environment for at-risk students; as well as strategies to raise student engagement, reduce apathy, challenge their academic interests, and facilitate ongoing support for teachers' knowledge development and collegial exchange.

Finally, as public education enters the 21st Century, the public increasingly looks for more efficient and equitable ways of providing schooling services that meet their high expectations. In some locales, city and state governments have taken over the public schools. System-wide sanctions and support strategies are applied to hold schools and students accountable for their performance. In other states and cities, charter schools within the public sector have been encouraged. Parental preferences and school autonomy are seen as the driving force to improve low-performing schools. Regardless of one's position on these emerging alternatives, there is an urgent research need to find out whether and how these new strands of service delivery are working. LSS aims to synthesize the existing knowledge base on these reforms and gather firsthand information on the design and implementation of alternative governance practices.

## Key Accomplishments

**LSS National Invitational Conference Series.** These series address emerging issues of national importance and formulate next-step solutions. A major goal of the series is to cull from research and practical knowledge on what works and what does not work to significantly improve this nation's capacity to achieve healthy development and educational success of children and families. A major outcome of the series is the opportunity to exchange information and viewpoints mutually beneficial to the design and implementation of classroom practice, research priorities, and identify pressing technical assistance and professional development needs. Conference participants evaluated the series and indicated that LSS provided effective and high-quality products and services that continue to meet the ever-changing needs and goals of educational reform.

**Community for Learning (CFL).** The CFL program is a whole-school improvement model that connects the school, the family, and the community to implement a coordinated approach to achieve student success. At the core of CFL is an integrated design framework that emphasizes the implementation of a powerful instructional program and a collaborative process that links the resources and expertise of schools with other learning environments, including homes, churches, libraries, public- and private-sector workplaces, and postsecondary institutions. Education programs conducted in these environments are coordinated with those of various government agencies, such as health and social services, housing, and law enforcement. These programs are connected with community revitalization efforts to create a broad-based commitment to improve learning and competence of children and youth and the adults who serve them—in short, a Community for

Learning. Findings from an evaluation of CFL indicated that the program was making a difference in student achievement and provides a model for consistent school and classroom practices.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**School choice vs. best systems** provides an overview of research and practical applications of innovative school reforms being implemented across the nation *(Spring 2001)*.

**New teachers for a new century** takes stock of the preparedness and quality of the present and prospective teaching force and examines ways to improve the quality of instruction in the nation's classrooms *(Summer 2001)*.

**Improving educational productivity** utilizes new econometric methods to examine the relations between educational funding and the production of student outcomes, exploring such relevant issues as state aid, teacher quality, and school efficiency *(Fall 2001)*.

**LSS Spotlight on Student Success Series** is a two-page research brief series that provides a summary of research findings based on the work of LSS researchers. To request copies or to access the series online, contact the LSS Web Site (http://www.temple.edu/lss).

**A national invitational conference on successful reading instruction.** LSS will host a conference aimed at identifying ways to translate important research findings in reading and reading instruction into practice *(Fall 2001, Washington, DC)*.

# Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning

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## Mission

To make a difference in the quality of education and learning for all through excellence in applied research, product development, and service. In carrying out its mission, McREL works collaboratively with its clients to improve educational policy and practice through the application of knowledge from research, development, and experience.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

McREL is engaged in applied research, development, service, and dissemination initiatives designed to provide educators with the procedural ("how-to") knowledge they need to create high-performing learning communities. McREL's work in the Central Region is organized to address four critical problems:

- the lack of capacity to use standards to reform classroom practice;
- the declining availability of quality teachers;
- the lack of leadership capacity to build high-performing learning systems; and
- the failure to adequately support reform efforts.

**Lack of capacity to use standards to reform classroom practice** (staff contact: Lou Cicchinelli). McREL is helping states and districts in the Central Region develop and adopt standards-based curricula, instruction methods, and classroom assessments. Specifically, McREL is developing a process that districts and states can use to create grade-level benchmarks. McREL is also creating exemplary standards and instructional units linked to the standards to help teachers address more than one standard or benchmark with a single lesson unit. In addition, McREL is researching what practices and structures are most effective in creating standards-based classrooms in "beat-the-odds" schools.

At the state level, McREL is designing a process for evaluating the structure of state assessments and accountability systems against new national standards for accountability created by the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing and the Center for Policy Research in

Education. As an outgrowth of this work, we will begin designing guidelines and models for comprehensive state accountability systems that balance local and state responsibility as appropriate to the region. Furthermore, we will continue to provide training and technical assistance in accountability and assessment systems to local education agencies.

**The declining availability of quality teachers** (staff contact: Lou Cicchinelli). The work in this problem area is designed to address two broad elements of teacher quality: teacher qualifications and preparation, (including preservice learning and in-service teacher learning), and support in the workplace; and teacher instructional practices. McREL is identifying the necessary elements to prepare teachers who positively affect K–12 student learning in standards-based classrooms. In addition, McREL is analyzing the incentives states are using to encourage districts to adopt effective professional development programs and studying the impact of these policies on the quality and availability of teachers in the region. McREL also plans to research teacher compensation issues and needs prior to developing a pilot, exemplary teacher compensation system. Finally, McREL will provide technical assistance to build the capacity of intermediate service agency staff in the region to provide professional development on topics related to standards-based education.

**The lack of leadership capacity to build high-performing learning systems** (staff contact: Lou Cicchinelli). To foster increased leadership capacity in districts and schools in the region, McREL is hosting academies providing follow-up training for leaders of high-needs schools in the region. McREL is also bringing together networks of urban superintendents, rural educators, and chief state school officers to facilitate the sharing of best practices, procedural knowledge, and the creation of learning communities. In addition, through its rural initiative, McREL will be creating a Web site providing resources designed specifically to address the needs of rural schools. Finally, McREL will conduct research studies to examine the relationships among different variables of leadership capacity and student achievement.

**The failure to adequately support reform efforts** (staff contact: Lou Cicchinelli). McREL's fourth problem area focuses on helping states and schools develop capacity to transform low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities. To this end, McREL is working with state education agencies to help them address issues of organizational policy and program structures, fragmentation, and lack of focus at the state level. At the local level, McREL is providing technical assistance to schools that have adopted comprehensive school reform models to help them successfully implement and sustain these programs. Likewise, McREL is forming consortia of low-performing schools in South Dakota and Kansas. These schools will share lessons learned and receive technical assistance from McREL to help them become high-performing learning communities. Lastly, McREL is continuing to develop and field test a comprehensive process for integrating technology into school curriculum, which in turn, becomes an avenue for districts to improve instruction and foster systemic reform.

## National Leadership Area

**Standards-based instructional practice** (staff contact: Lou Cicchinelli). The cornerstone of McREL's strategy for developing the national leadership area of standards-based instructional practice is facilitating a media-supported and technologically sustained national dialogue on education, known as the *National Dialogue*, in collaboration with strategic partners from across the nation. Given the backdrop of the current environment surrounding standards—where a movement that arose from concern for children often has been mired in division, polarization, and politicization—we are attempting to raise the quality and productivity of public discourse on

education reform. The purpose of the *National Dialogue* is to move the country beyond debate and contention to a point where the public can begin to share success stories and ways to use standards-based reforms to benefit all students.

The *National Dialogue* will take place over the next 2 years and will be a collective, cumulative process. In other words, no single event is "the Dialogue." The first of a series of national, regional, state, and local opportunities for dialogue took place in April of 2001 at the Kauffman Foundation in Kansas City, Missouri. The *National Dialogue* Web Site (http://www.nationaldialogue.org) serves as both an information repository for the Dialogue and a forum where participants take part in ongoing, real time "virtual" dialogues.

In addition to the Dialogue project, McREL is monitoring and synthesizing research literature related to standards-based instruction. We will compile this data into a research report as a well as a user-friendly publication, which will be disseminated across the region and nation.

## Key Accomplishments

Two accomplishments from the last contract help set the stage for McREL's current focus on procedural knowledge and improving low-performing schools.

**Online standards database.** This database (http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks) helps to address the regional problem area of the lack of capacity to use standards to reform classroom practice. It makes accessible the work in *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K–12 Education*, which synthesizes information from more than 137 documents and reports that address what students should know and be able to do. During 2000, over 280,000 people connected to the standards database. In addition, many organizations—including Achieve, Inc.; Scholastic, Inc.; and the New York Times—use the database to support their work to improve educational practice. The site also provides classroom activities linked to standards and benchmarks. They are designed to help educators implement standards by providing them with exemplary lesson and unit plan ideas. During 2000, over 44,000 educators accessed these activities.

**Research into Practice Series.** This program prepares staff development providers to conduct a series of workshops to improve classroom practice and thus, student achievement. The trainings focus on four key areas: Implementing Standards in the Classroom; Classroom Assessment, Grading, and Record Keeping; Effective Instructional Practices; and Enhancing Reading Development. Collectively, the series helps to address the problem area of the failure to adequately support reform efforts by providing low-performing schools with research-based training on how to boost reading achievement and use assessment data to guide instruction. The modules were pilot tested with over 300 regional educators—75 percent of whom said they increased their understanding of the subject area as a result; more than 90 percent said they planned to use the information in their schools or districts.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**Policy forum.** McREL continues to host annual forums bringing together key policymakers from the Central Region. Participants share experiences and gain insights from education research on issues of mutual concern  (*Summer 2001, Denver, Colorado).*

**Online toolkit for school leaders.** This site (http://www.mcrel.org/toolkit) provides information about systems theory as well as brief discussions of key education topics and a list of related resources. The site will be expanded and reoriented to better meet the needs of low-performing schools in transition (*Winter 2001).*

**Leadership academies.** McREL is working with nationally recognized principals to develop and provide leadership academies for principals, teachers, and other leaders in low-performing schools and districts in Kansas and South Dakota *(the initial academy is scheduled for the Summer 2001).*

**Meta-analysis of classroom management strategies.** To employ effective instructional techniques, teachers also need to know how to effectively manage student behavior in the classroom. In response to this need, McREL is conducting a meta-analysis of classroom management strategies that have been shown to have positive impacts on student achievement. A final report will be available after the conclusion of this study *(Winter 2001).*

# North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

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## Mission

To improve the performance of all parts and levels of the K–12 educational system from the classroom to the state by:

- making research-based knowledge useful to and usable by educators, policymakers, and the wider community;
- integrating research, policy, and practice around issues of transforming schools into high-performing learning communities; and
- providing regional and national leadership in applying technology to improve student learning.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

Working with its constituents to synthesize and assess the needs of the region has enabled NCREL to identify three areas of critical and enduring concern:

1.  *Educational technology*: Too many educators lack the procedural knowledge or support required to integrate technology effectively into teaching and learning.

2.  *Literacy*: Too many students, especially those in high-poverty and minority groups, are poor readers and writers.

3.  *The use of data in making decision*s: Educators lack access to and the capacity to use high-quality, well-organized data to inform their professional decisions.

NCREL's programmatic work to address these problems is distributed across two centers: the Center for Curriculum and Technology and the Center for Data Systems and Development. Designed to support the efforts of constituents, NCREL's activities are integrated across research, policy, and practice and are intended to advance and promote the procedural knowledge about high-performing learning communities.

**Educational technology** (staff contact: Gilbert Valdez). With the integration of technology into every aspect of the workplace, the integration of technology into teaching and learning is essential. However, educators have insufficient professional development opportunities in technology use; there are inadequate or misaligned technology policy and governance structures in place; there is a

clear need for systemic integration into school practice and reform; and access to educational technology resources is too often inequitable.

NCREL's Center for Curriculum and Technology provides school leaders with more and better access to the procedural knowledge necessary to apply technology to learning across the educational system. NCREL's research-driven publications and Web-based tools provide educators, especially those in high-need urban and rural areas, with high-quality professional development resources related to the application of technology to learning. In addition, policy staff  members work directly with policymakers and administrators to align governance and administration around technology integration with the goal of promoting the development of high-performing learning communities. Valuable intensive sites and partners include the region's state departments of education, Mahnomen Public Schools on the White Earth Indian Reservation in northern Minnesota, National School Boards Association, Metiri Group, North Central Mathematics and Science Consortium, and North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium.

**Literacy** (staff  contact: Gilbert Valdez). Literacy truly is the gateway skill to all other academic achievement, yet assessment results continue to show that too many students have inadequate skills. K–12 teachers are not prepared to teach all students to be successful readers. They do not have easy access to tools and resources that can support their knowledge and skill development. In addition, national, regional, and state literacy initiatives have not been effectively coordinated to leverage resources, share research and best practice data, support the development of knowledge-based tools and services for teachers, or inform policy and practice.

NCREL's Center for Curriculum and Technology provides teachers and administrators—through preservice and in-service professional development opportunities—with the knowledge, instructional tools, and resources to help them understand how students learn to read and develop literacy skills. NCREL staff  help teachers choose and use resources—including technology—that are appropriate for the specific needs of the students in their classrooms. NCREL provides teachers with mechanisms to measure student progress and results in order to improve instruction and individual student literacy development. Another critical part of NCREL's literacy work is the synthesis and dissemination of literacy education research and best practice across the region—as well as the nation—via the Internet and other outreach vehicles. Partnerships include the state education agencies; Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement; Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence; Council of Chief State School Officers; and National Center for Adult Literacy.

**Use of data** (staff contact: Scott Jones). As the gap between low- and high-achieving students continues to grow and the implementation of high-stakes, performance-based accountability systems becomes the norm, more informed educational decisionmaking has become increasingly important. At the same time, educators lack access to and the capacity to use high-quality, well-organized data to inform their professional decisions, particularly around the issues of content, capacity, culture, and consequences.

The Center for Data Systems and Development strives to understand how improved data and better decisions can help schools close achievement gaps between groups of students. NCREL's focus is not just on data, but also on *how* data are being used by decisionmakers. NCREL is developing repositories of these important data, providing analyses of trends, and bringing together various stakeholders to discuss solutions to this challenge. NCREL's research work investigates the impact of current preservice training and professional development opportunities on the capacity for data use

and continuous improvement in schools. NCREL also works closely with policymakers and educators to provide more accessible data and the capacity for analysis. Partnerships and intensive sites include the Minority Student Achievement Network, Council of Chief State School Officers, TIMSS-R Benchmarking Study states and districts, Illinois Institute of Technology Center for Research and Service, Education Commission of the States, Michigan State University, and state education agencies.

## National Leadership Area

**Educational technology** (staff contact: Gilbert Valdez). Educators are not yet effectively integrating technology into teaching and learning, and still struggle with evaluating its effectiveness for students is a national problem. Although technology continues to advance at a rapid pace, the heart of NCREL's work and vision remains the same: Integrating technology into instructional approaches will increase student achievement by improving the quality of curricula and instruction.

NCREL provides leadership to educators through:

- *Applied research and development*, including research syntheses and studies, Web-based knowledge resources and tools, and technology-based professional development tools.

- *Networking and dissemination* activities, including establishing an expert panel on emerging technologies in education, sponsoring an annual invitational conference on educational technology, and disseminating information and resources from research and development activities through NCREL's Web Site and publications, REL system outlets (e.g., *Gateway to Educational Material*, *Knowledge Loom*, REL Web Site) and other appropriate national vehicles (e.g., journal articles, newspaper editorials).

NCREL is fortunate to host and work closely with the North Central Mathematics and Science Consortium to provide direct technical assistance to state education agencies, intermediate educational units, and school districts; and the North Central Regional Technology in Education Consortium to help schools and districts integrate technology into teaching and learning.

## Key Accomplishments

**Technology.** NCREL will continue to extend the breadth and depth of its work in the field of educational technology. One key focus of the Lab's work is the impact of technology on student learning, an issue that continues to grow in national importance. *EnGauge* is a Web-based framework for effective technology use developed in a partnership with the Metiri Group. The *enGauge* Web Site offers technology improvement teams a one-stop resource for studying, measuring, and improving the effective use of technology in the educational system. The development process for *enGauge* was guided by frequent focus groups and external reviews. Based on these reviews, the parameters of an online survey were established, as well as guidelines for database design and functionality, user interface design, and reporting structures. Constituents in Indiana, Wisconsin, and Iowa are currently using the Web site, and NCREL continues its development.

**Data retreats.** NCREL also is scaling up the practice of hosting Data Retreats for school improvement teams throughout the North Central region and the nation. Working closely with Judy Sargent, Ph.D., of the Cooperative Educational Service Agency No. 7 (CESA 7) in Green Bay, Wisconsin, NCREL brings district and school-level leadership teams together to analyze and discuss

student data, and to develop a databased improvement plan. During these 2- to 3-day retreats, participants define problems and goals, develop strategies, and make a commitment to using data. District and school staff analyze patterns of data and develop a plan that has true meaning for school change.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**NCREL's National Invitational Educational Technology Conference.** This year's conference is entitled "High-Performance, High-Technology Learning Communities: Preparing Our Students for the Future" *(Summer 2001).*

**ETCNet (Educational Technology Center Network) Web Site** will pull together NCREL's growing wealth of educational technology resources and provide a single entry point for easy access *(Winter 2001).*

**First Annual Regional Literacy Network Meeting** will be hosted by NCREL for teams from all seven states. The goal of the event is to facilitate collaboration and information sharing, identify problems related to low reading performance, and plan intervention strategies for staff development *(2001).*

**NCREL's Learning Point Magazine** will take an in-depth look at closing the achievement gaps. The cover story will address the dimensions of the gaps, demonstrate their link to the accountability movement, and explore barriers as well as opportunities for closing the gaps *(Fall 2001).*

# Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

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## Mission

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's (NWREL) mission is to improve educational results for children, youth, and adults by providing research and development assistance in delivering equitable, high-quality educational programs.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

NWREL is using an integrated approach to address five priority problems northwest schools face as they strive to become high-performing institutions (staff coordinator: Steve Nelson).

**Re-engineering** (staff contact: Alf Langland). Schools face the problem of re-engineering themselves to plan, implement, and sustain the capacity to become high-performing learning communities. Re-engineering is the fundamental building block for school reform. Through re-engineering, schools, districts, and their communities use quality management principles to implement the structures, processes, programs, and training necessary to renew themselves based on a shared vision, changing context, student population, proven successful practices, and community expectations and requirements. Re-engineering focuses on the most challenging changes—changes in the culture of the school, changes in what people do and how they do it, and changes in how people relate to one another and work in teams. Since schools are embedded within districts, communities, and states, how schools, parents, and districts interact is part of the complex web of relationships that must become productive.

**Quality teaching and learning** (staff contact: Jerian Abel). Schools face the problem of how to more effectively plan, implement, and sustain quality teaching and learning that contributes to high-performing learning communities. The quality of classroom instruction is key to student achievement and is dependent on the quality of the school staff. Changes solely to curriculum, organizational structure, or piecemeal training in new strategies will not bring about the changes needed to create high-performing learning communities. Professional development, as the analysis of teaching and learning, should focus on the role of the learner, the role of the teacher, and how learning takes place. There must be a forward-looking focus on several aspects of system, culture, customer needs, and quality improvement. Transforming a school into a high-performing learning community that requires the school and individuals in the school have a shared vision, driven by student needs, to change their ideas and beliefs of teaching and learning.

**Student assessment** (staff contact: Dean Arrasmith). Schools face the problem of more adequately assessing students' progress in achieving high performance standards. Well-aligned, authentic, and continuous feedback is needed to inform teachers, students, and parents of their progress in meeting state standards. Teachers need to know how to develop quality assessments for day-to-day work. Schools need to know how to develop and use assessment information to guide decisionmaking. Among educators and policymakers, there is a strong belief in the power of standards-based assessments to motivate changes in teaching and students' learning that is based in part on the power of assessments to define what is important to learn. Assessment ultimately, and specifically, defines what educators and the community want students to know and be able to do. Assessment tasks translate academic standards into specific meaning for students and teachers.

**Literacy and language development** (staff contact: Rebecca Novick). Schools face the problem of how to achieve high levels of literacy and language development among all of their students. Educators need access to research-based practices in language development and the ability to make wise choices from the wealth of resource materials and programs that exist to address the learning needs of their students and to meet challenging literacy standards. During the early elementary years, learning to read is the top priority; school success depends, in large part, on how successful children are in learning to read. Literacy remains the key to school success throughout a student's school years and is critical for full social and economic participation in our increasingly knowledge-dependent, technological society. Although in middle and high school, teachers may view their primary responsibility as conveying the content of their subject area, it is increasingly understood by educators that reading in middle and high school is a critical issue to be addressed.

**School, family, and community partnerships** (staff contact: Steffen Saifer). Schools face the problem of how to develop and sustain school, family, and community partnerships that clearly contribute to high levels of student performance. School staff tend to see family and community partnership activities as peripheral to meeting standards, rather than as central to achieving them. Assessments of children at all levels and of all types tend to ignore cultural and family considerations, attributes, goals, and strengths. The ultimate result is that the current relationship between schools and families, in too many cases, can be characterized as lacking in trust, mutual support, and a commitment to a partnership for the benefit of the children. Schools must work with families and communities in new and different ways if every student is to achieve challenging standards. In addition, communities must work with schools to create and extend learning opportunities for children and adults in safe and engaging environments.

NWREL is using three interrelated strategies to help schools in each of the five northwest states to overcome these problems in becoming high-performing institutions:

- *Regional awareness and outreach activities* are conducted to engage educators in an ongoing way in delineating problems, discussing their resolution, and disseminating resource information.

- *Research and development services* are made broadly available to educators across the region to apply existing procedural knowledge, tools, and processes.

- *In-depth, long-term research and development services* are delivered to 15 high poverty, low-performing schools across the 5-state region to achieve high levels of student performance. These 15 schools are the primary partner sites in developing and evaluating effective research and development products and processes for schools to become high-performing organizations.

# National Leadership Area

**Re-Engineering schools for improvement** (staff contract: Bob Blum). NWREL's national leadership area in Re-engineering Schools for Improvement extends and enhances its past successful work in its national specialty on school change.

Re-engineering is the process of making things work. It means using what has been learned about standards, school organization, comprehensive reform, and other initiatives to help schools become high-performing learning communities. However, it is conceptually distinct from past and present reform movements, and addresses the needs and challenges schools will face in the coming decades. This involves helping schools:

- implement structures, processes, and programs that have the greatest potential for improving student performance;

- build the personal and organizational capacity necessary to support intensive reform;

- create an organizational culture that promotes the values of collaboration, shared responsibility,

- continuous learning by adults and students, and continuous improvement in student performance;

- bring focus and coherence to efforts that sometimes address competing demands (such as the demand for higher scores on multiple choice tests, and the demand for learner-centered instructional strategies that foster deeper understanding);

- negotiate the multiple challenges stemming from changing demands, higher expectations, and greater ethnic and socioeconomic diversity; and

- figure out ways to reallocate resources—including time for staff s to work, reflect, and plan together—in support of higher student performance.

Work is being carried out in three components—research synthesis, direct support to schools, and dissemination.

- *Research synthesis* products developed annually are: a topical synthesis related to re-engineering, descriptions of research in practice in schools or districts that have re-engineered successfully and achieved results, and updated descriptions and new model descriptions in the *Catalog of School Reform Models.*

- *Direct support to schools* is delivered through: an annual National Re-engineering Forum, Topical Institutes that are regional training sessions providing focused interaction for school leaders, and training and assistance for skill development of teams and individuals in districts and schools.

- *Dissemination* includes print, media, and electronic activities.

This work is being carried out in collaboration with the American Association of School Administrators, National Association of Secondary School Principals, National Association of

Elementary School Principals, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown, Consortium for Policy Research in Education, Council of Chief State School Officers, and National Clearinghouse on Comprehensive School Reform.

## Key Accomplishments

NWREL "signature programs" of work conducted over two decades in Trait-Based Assessment and Effective Schooling Practices provide a research and development base for current work in the Student Assessment and Re-engineering problem areas.

**Trait-Based Assessment**. NWREL's trait-based assessment models in writing, reading, oral communication, mathematics problem solving, and bilingual language development provide teachers with powerful tools to assess students' learning and to organize instruction. Assessment literacy is a critical part of professional development activities for teachers and school administrators to be able to make maximum use of high-quality assessment results to guide student learning and to plan effective school improvement activities.

NWREL's 6+1 Traits Writing Assessment Model has revolutionized writing assessment and instruction in many thousands of classrooms across the nation. The training associated with the 6+1 Traits Writing Assessment Model is provided through workshops, training institutes, and training of trainers institutes. The training of trainers institutes have led to a large cadre of local and regional trainers who share the model beyond NWREL's training activities. Writing has provided a model for other language skills development work of NWREL. In the past 3 years approximately 3,600 teachers have participated in nearly 40 Traits of an Effective Reader training events. Most recently, assessment models have been completed in Oral Communications and Spanish Writing. The Mathematics Problem Solving Model toolkit includes all of the materials and resources necessary to implement the model in schools and districts, including a K–12 analytical trait scoring guide, student work samples at all levels, anchor papers to guide teachers in assessing students' problem solving, grade-level appropriate and standards-based tasks, sample workshop agencies, handouts and overhead masters, classroom observation tools, and problem solving video.

**Effective schooling practices.** NWREL's syntheses of more than 30 years of educational research have identified and verified school- and classroom-level practices that foster superior student performance within a high-performing organization. This body of knowledge is used to guide assistance to schools in such areas as safe and supportive school environments characterized by agreed-upon vision and standards; sound building and classroom management principles; improved student performance; communication of high learning expectations; equity in educational opportunities and outcomes; and community and parental support of students' learning. Two NWREL landmark publications—*Research You Can Use to Improve Results* and *Schooling Practices That Matter Most*—are published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

These research synthesis resources provide the foundation for NWREL's comprehensive school reform model, *Onward to Excellence (OTE)*. OTE engages the full school community in reform, including principal, teachers, other staff, students, parents, community members, and central office staff. Thirty-three schools across the country are using the new generation model called OTE II to guide their comprehensive school reform efforts and improve student learning. After only 1 year of implementation, some of the schools are reporting improvements in test scores.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**Education Now and in the Future Conference** is the northwest region's major professional development event, drawing more than a thousand participants each year *(Fall 2001, Portland, Oregon).*

**By request booklets.** Three booklets are developed each year on a topic of frequently requested information. Each booklet contains an explanation of the topic's relevance, a sampling of how northwest schools are dealing with the issue, suggestions for adapting these ideas to schools, and selected references and contact information. The first 2001 booklet was completed in May on the topic of *Supporting Beginning Teachers.*

**Northwest Education magazine.** Topics of quarterly issues in 2001 are charter schools, school building design *(both now available)*, education standards *(October 2001)*, and teacher preparation and induction *(December 2001).*

**Problem-focused resources.** Process guides, research syntheses, effective practices description, and training manuals being developed in 2001 in NWREL's five problem areas of work include:

- Re-engineering Schools: *Getting Started* process guide *(Fall 2001)* and *Smaller Learning Communities* research synthesis *(Winter 2001).*

- Quality Teaching and Learning: *Sustaining Teachers' Motivation to Improve Classroom Practice* research synthesis *(Winter 2001).*

- Assessment: Assessment Consumer Skills and Knowledge *(Winter 2001).*

- Reading and Language Development: Resource guide for teacher study teams *(Winter 2001).*

- Family and Community Partnerships: Evaluation that Empowers training manual *(Fall 2001).*

# Pacific Resources for Education and Learning

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| **States Served:** | American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap), Guam, Hawaii, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau |
| **OERI Program Officer:** | Stephanie Stoll Dalton, (202) 208–2497, stephanie.dalton@ed.gov |

## Mission

To strengthen culture, increase literacy, and improve quality of life locally, nationally, and globally.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

PREL serves 10 U.S. affiliated entities with varying political status including a state, a commonwealth, a territory, and 4 independent nations in free association with the United States. The region is spread across 4.9 million square miles of ocean, islands, and atolls. It is geographically vast and diverse, and many outlying areas are remote and not easily accessible. Economic conditions in the region are typically below U.S. poverty levels, and disproportionate percentages of the population are undereducated and unemployed. Pacific languages are predominant in most of the entities; thus, many people are English-as-second-language learners.

PREL's Board of Directors (which includes the chief state school officers from the 10 entities served by PREL) identified the top 3 critical problems challenging Pacific education as follows:

- Problem 1: In the Pacific, significant numbers of students are not reading independently in either English or their home languages by the end of third grade (staff contact: Tim Donahue).

- Problem 2: Low-performing schools in the region have difficulty improving student learning in part because they lack adequate or appropriate assessment systems and accountability processes (staff contact: Don Burger).

- Problem 3: A significant percentage of teachers in the Pacific region do not have the necessary content knowledge or pedagogical skills to create high-performing learning communities (staff contact: L. David van Broekhuizen).

PREL will use a holistic and integrated approach in addressing the problem areas of reading, assessment and accountability, and professional development. Working intensively with a small set of schools to build procedural knowledge and document successful practices and strategies, PREL will

test that knowledge by transferring it to a larger set of schools and promote the use of this knowledge broadly throughout the region.

PREL will work with Pacific departments and ministries of education to identify approximately 13 Co-Development Partner (CDP) Schools, at least 1 elementary school in each entity served by PREL, to serve as primary research and development sites. PREL will work collaboratively with these schools on an ongoing and sustained basis. Generating and supporting site-based solutions to the problems identified as major issues in the Pacific region, PREL will guide and support the efforts of Pacific educators to create high-performing learning communities. Support to each site will include the development of a school-based school improvement plan focusing on reading and assessment, in-class teacher guidance and support, development of first-language and/or English reading materials and assessments, and additional professional development.

PREL will also work with approximately 25 Collaborative Partner Schools throughout the Region. These schools will have access to the learnings from the work in the CDP Schools while also serving as pilot sites to determine the efficacy and replicability of the strategies, practices, and materials developed and implemented at the CDP Schools. The entire school-improvement process will be driven by research and guided by formative evaluation. It will include curriculum, instruction, and assessment components focusing on reading and assessment and accountability while adhering to PREL's quality-assurance protocols and practices to ensure high-quality work.

PREL will partner and work collaboratively with the other regional-educational laboratories as well as institutions of higher education, national research centers (e.g., Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence, and Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing) and professional agencies and organizations (e.g., National Association of State Boards of Education, American Educational Research Association, and the International Reading Association), and state education departments and ministries, engaging in meaningful and in-depth investigation of educational issues of importance to school communities, not only in the Pacific region but throughout the nation. PREL's most important partners are the schools, communities, and educational professionals in the entities it serves in the U.S. affiliated Pacific.

## National Leadership Area

**Curriculum and Instruction Related to Reading and Language Mastery** (staff contact: Tim Donahue). PREL's work in the national leadership area of curriculum and instruction related to Reading and Language Mastery will focus on improving reading and literacy instruction by facilitating access to appropriate, high-quality teaching and learning resources on the World Wide Web.

In response to the current problems associated with the overwhelming amount of reading and language-mastery information now freely available via the World Wide Web, PREL will design, develop, and maintain a Web site that will find, organize, and interrelate information resources on reading and language mastery. The Web site will feature a virtual reference interview using natural language to match the user's interest with the most appropriate information.

The Web site will be conceptually based and organized around a two-dimensional matrix that features a user-friendly interface. Teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, and parents will be able to easily access information and resources pertaining to:

- ensuring excellent learning environments that maximize reading success;

- promoting the use of effective strategies in literacy development in the early grades;

- increasing teachers' content knowledge and skills in providing reading instruction; and

- accommodating the literacy needs of English language learners.

A panel of nationally recognized experts in the areas of reading, assessment and accountability, professional development, and English as a second language will ensure that all Web sites and pages included in the matrix will provide high-quality, research-based information resources.

## Key Accomplishments

Learning from what has come before and building on that knowledge is a powerful paradigm in the Pacific region. During the previous 5 years of the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Program, PREL conducted valuable and informative research that guided its efforts to support the Region's education community in striving for excellence, while also providing information leading to changes in education policy.

**PLUS Study**. One of the most important research endeavors of the previous REL contract was the Pacific Language Use in Schools (PLUS) Study. The PLUS Study examined literacy instruction and achievement in Pacific languages and English. As a result of this study, a database containing research and information on current reading instruction was compiled. The database is a valuable resource that will inform the literacy improvement efforts to be implemented during the current REL contract. Additionally, Pacific-language reading assessments in nine indigenous languages were developed for the study and are currently being used as a measure of initial first-language literacy in several Pacific entities. PREL's work in the development of these reading assessments was groundbreaking. The majority of entities in PREL's region did not previously have any measure of first-language reading achievement. PREL's work in literacy in both English and Pacific languages continues into the next REL contract. PREL staff   will continue to support the development of valid, reliable, and relevant reading assessments both for classroom use as well as for entity-wide testing.

**Improving literacy**. During the previous 5-year contract, PREL developed a series of print and multimedia products related to improving literacy efforts in linguistically diverse contexts. PREL utilized a combination of these products in schools, institutions of higher education, communities for training, and other professional-development endeavors related to literacy. The research series included Language Use at Home and School, Teacher Diversity: Implications for Professional Development, and Literacy in Indigenous Communities. Among the multimedia products are the Reading Aloud to Children bilingual tapes, which give parents guidance on how to read with their children, and the Pacific Area Language Materials (PALM) CD-ROM, a compilation of hundreds of stories, legends, and other literacy materials in Pacific languages. In response to regional needs, PREL will continue to provide support in the development of first-language reading materials and their use to improve literacy instruction.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**Pacific Educational Conference.** The conference is one of the largest gatherings of Pacific educators featuring hundreds of presentations by regional practitioners *(Summer 2001, Guam).*

**School renewal process.** PREL will work to develop a school renewal process that is research-based and designed and developed specifically for schools in the Pacific region. This will include process templates to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment with student-learning standards *(Pilot in Fall 2001).*

**Literacy series.** The production of a monograph series on critical topics addressing creation of literacy-focused high-performing learning communities. These may include a framework for effective professional development in the Pacific region, research papers on improving Reading Outcomes in the Pacific region, and research papers on developing quality Assessment/Accountability Systems in the Pacific region *(Winter 2001).*

**Early-reading guide.** This guide will help assess a school's early-reading program and will include templates for teachers to monitor and track student progress in reading in the early grades; reporting formats to communicate student progress in reading achievement to parents; and a sampler of formative assessments for early reading achievement in English as well as in the home language of bilingual learners *(Pilot in Fall 2001).*

**High-frequency word lists for the 10 predominant languages in the pacific region.** Lists in these languages are not presently available, but are crucial to the development of early literacy. The lists will be derived from the PALM CD-ROM developed during the previous PREL contract *(Winter 2001).*

# Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

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## Mission

To find, share, and sustain effective solutions to educational problems facing practitioners and decisionmakers in the southwestern United States. SEDL's particular emphasis is on ensuring educational equity for all students.

SEDL pursues this mission through diverse and interrelated funding and project arrangements. The primary strategies are those of integrated research, development, and dissemination.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

According to state data, more than 450 schools and districts in the southwestern region are classified as low performing. The methods for identifying these schools differ as do the characteristics of the schools and districts and the nature of their performance. Despite these differences, schools and districts in the region share some common problems.

- **All five states must improve student achievement in reading and mathematics** (staff contact: David Rainey and David Hill). Too many students in all five states fail to meet state expectations in one or both subjects, and students who are not successful in reading and mathematics are unlikely to be successful in school or later in life.

- **Nearly all low-performing schools and districts in the region lack the "know-how" to make significant improvements** (staff contact: David Rainey and David Hill). Staffs in low-performing schools and districts have little practice in translating their beliefs and expectations into a coherent educational program, and in aligning curriculum and assessments with standards. They need assistance in learning to collect, analyze, and interpret data that would help them assess their current practice, define their problem, and manage their work. Those staff s also need help in finding strategies to improve their performance and build their capacity to carry out such work.

- **Assistance and support must be available at both school and district levels** (staff contact: David Rainey and David Hill). Improvements at the school level alone will not be sustained without support from the district level as well. In addition, districts that learn to work

successfully with one or two low-performing schools will be able to transfer the knowledge and skills gained to work with other low-performing schools.

- · **The technical assistance infrastructure in each state lacks the capacity and/or resources to respond to the numbers of low-performing schools and districts requiring assistance** (staff contact: David Rainey and David Hill). The five state education agencies in SEDL's region acknowledge there are not enough resources available to provide high-quality assistance to low-performing schools and districts in need.

- • **Limited research-based information exists on helping low-performing schools and districts transform into high-performing learning communities** (staff contact: Shirley Hord for practitioners and Catherine Clark for policymakers). The existing R&D knowledge base is rich with advice on how to work on more isolated and limited improvement problems, but lacks guidance on how to work more systemically and to build a culture of continuous inquiry and improvement. Moreover, that lack of knowledge exists across state, district, school, and classroom levels of the system for practitioners and policymakers alike.

With its partner, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, SEDL is addressing critical problems through its work to assist low-performing schools and districts in becoming high-performing learning communities. SEDL will work intensively with 20 sites, each containing the district office and one or more low-performing schools. The purpose is to help each build its capacity to consistently attain high levels of student achievement, the essence of a high-performing learning community. As part of this partnership with schools and districts, SEDL will provide research-based, long-term technical assistance in improving reading and mathematics instruction. SEDL will start site work by helping the staff of each school and district assess its needs, plan for improvement, and make strategic decisions to improve teaching and learning.

As SEDL helps schools and districts adopt deeper, more systemic approaches to the improvement of teaching and learning, they will also build the capacity of the existing technical assistance infrastructure in each state to support the transformation of low-performing schools and districts. SEDL will identify at least one assistance provider at each site. At the same time, SEDL will work with a larger group of technical assistance providers in each state to reflect on findings and share tools.

Besides deepening the skills of regional technical assistance providers, SEDL will contribute to the body of procedural knowledge about how practitioners and policymakers can work across levels and components of the education system. This "know-how" will focus on the content, as well as the relationships, linkages, and pathways that schools, districts, and policymakers can follow to support transformations to high-performing learning communities. To enrich the research base about systemic approaches, SEDL will also translate that procedural knowledge into new or modified tools and products to be used by technical assistance providers, practitioners, policymakers, and community members.

## National Leadership Area

**Family and community involvement** (staff contact: Catherine Jordan). SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools focuses on the problem of involving families and communities in schools to promote student achievement, especially in reading and mathematics. Specifically, the work of the Center addresses three questions: how to involve families from diverse

communities in schools?; how to involve parents in preparing children to enter kindergarten?; and how to involve community organizations in developing high-performing learning communities in schools? The Center has identified the following strategies to address these questions. The strategies are:

• Build a national presence for the Center that provides a trusted source for research and practice about connecting family and communities with schools to support student achievement.

• Synthesize emerging findings and resources so that an effective database of research and best practices is available.

• Disseminate information through an annual conference, an annual report, the media, and Web-based tools to help advance procedural knowledge in the area of connecting family and community involvement to student achievement.

• Work with such national partners as the Johns-Hopkins's Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships; the National Center for Early Development and Learning at UNC, Chapel Hill; and the Public Education Network, to gain expertise and leading edge knowledge about building comprehensive family and community connections with schools to support student learning.

• Provide training and networking across the Regional Education Laboratory network for information exchange and understanding of the field.

## Key Accomplishments

During FY2001–05, SEDL will build on the procedural knowledge, which was developed by two programs—Strategies for Increasing School Success (SISS) and the Program for Refining Educational Partnerships (PREP)—to address the development of professional learning communities and sustained partnerships among home, school, and communities to support student achievement.

**Development of learning communities.** The SISS program was designed to facilitate the development of professional learning communities in schools for the improvement of student learning. SEDL staff  examined what was needed for schools to operate as professional learning communities and what happened as schools undertook comprehensive school reform. The project resulted in the creation of procedural knowledge about the degree of readiness, organizational structures, and administrative supports needed for schools to take a more systemic approach to the improvement of student learning. SEDL found that five dimensions, which are vital to the development of a professional learning community, can help overcome barriers to implementing successful school improvement. From this work, SEDL developed tools such as *Leadership for Changing Schools* training program and a monograph, *Professional Learning Communities: An Ongoing Exploration.* The tools will be used as SEDL addresses the transformation of low-performing schools and development of technical assistance capacity.

**Development of sustained partnerships to support student achievement.** Working with schools and community members, SEDL's Program for Refining Educational Partnership developed and applied the Collaborative Action Team (CAT) process in 22 sites across the southwestern region. The partnerships were designed to be self-sustaining over time to support improved student outcomes.

Evaluation data show the majority of partnerships have been sustained from 1 to 4 years and indicate continued growth. SEDL created procedural knowledge about how to focus on student achievement, create certain organizational structures, and provide sufficient time so that schools and communities can develop self-sustaining collaborative partnerships. Based on the results of this program, SEDL developed print and electronic resources including *Creating Collaborative Action Teams: Working Together for Student Success*, which will be used with intensive site work.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**Regional policy forum.** SEDL will hold the 2001 policy forum on resource allocation. The forum will provide state-level policymakers and key staff   members with information on policy issues related to resource allocation. The keynote speaker will be Dr. Joe Johnson, Director of Compensatory Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education *(Fall 2001, Albuquerque, New Mexico).*

**Insights on education policy, research, and practice***,* SEDL's policy briefing paper series, is published annually and reports on policy concerns in the southwestern region. The first edition of *Insights* will report on current knowledge of resource allocation practice and will offer perspectives on the issues and challenges facing policymakers and practitioners. To access the *Insights* series online, go to http://www.sedl.org/pubs/policy/ *(Fall 2001, Release of First Edition).*

**Annual Forum on Family Involvement with Education**. SEDL's National Center for Family and Community Connections with Schools will convene its first annual forum in conjunction with the National Community Education Association (NCEA). NCEA's conference targets community educators, teachers, administrators, policymakers, higher education representatives, and community advisory committee members. SEDL will convene a full-day preconference program focused on the Center's research synthesis. The interactive session will engage participants in deepening their understanding of issues they face when building family and community connections with schools *(Fall 2001, Charleston, South Carolina).*

**Intensive site work.** "Early Findings from the Field," will be SEDL's first annual report about its intensive site work. The report will describe activities of districts and schools transforming themselves from low-performing schools to high-performing learning communities, and document their progress in improving student achievement in reading and mathematics *(Spring 2002).*

# The Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE

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## Mission

To promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

SERVE's program of work is targeted at a fundamental and pervasive regional problem—closing the achievement gap, particularly in low-performing schools. SERVE recognizes that it must address this problem by attacking a variety of root causes; therefore, the work of the Regional Educational Laboratory at SERVE is organized around six critical issues: transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities, advancing educator quality, informing public policy, closing the achievement gap through early childhood, promoting literacy, and implementing standards, assessment, and accountability. The work focuses on the production and dissemination of procedural knowledge—that is, the tools, models, procedures, etc. for addressing these critical issues.

**Transforming low-performing schools into high-performing learning communities** (staff contact: Mary Apodaca). At the forefront of the achievement gap are those schools each state has labeled "low-performing" or in greatest need of reform. Addressing their needs is a formidable challenge, requiring interventions designed to build the capacity for continuous improvement. SERVE employs the following linked strategies designed to help these schools:

• SuperSites, one of SERVE's signature works, has been in operation since January 2000, when the first SuperSite was launched in the Mississippi Delta in partnership with the North Bolivar School District of Shelby, Mississippi, a rural, high-poverty area. Five educator-mentors work one-on-one with teachers and administrators to implement the state-mandated Corrective Action Plan by revising curriculum, coaching in classrooms and at the school and district levels, and assisting with leadership development and strategic planning. Future sites are anticipated in other SERVE states. Current research and preliminary results indicate that this intensive, sustained intervention can accelerate reform and improvement in student performance in low-performing schools dramatically.

- Procedural knowledge—it isn't enough to capture it; SERVE recognizes the central importance of sharing the word with people who can use the information to make a difference in classrooms, schools, and communities. The SERVE Regional Forum on School Improvement and the Southern States Seminar (on low-performing schools) are annual events that illustrate how SERVE disseminates procedural knowledge to educators and provides an opportunity to share successful practices and lessons learned.

- Partnerships with state departments of education allow SERVE to expand its significant work addressing the needs of low-performing schools and districts. SERVE will partner with the Alabama Department of Education on the Alabama Low-Performing School Project to research and develop procedural knowledge and a systematic way to deliver services and technical assistance to reach classrooms and students. SERVE will work with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's Achievement Gap Office to define best-practice strategies with the highest promise for North Carolina schools.

- Addressing national problems and concerns, SERVE's National Center for Homeless Education is a research and information resource that disseminates referral information related to the complex needs surrounding the education of homeless children and youth.

**Advancing educator quality** (staff contact: Steven Bingham). With increased retirements stemming from an aging workforce, higher licensure standards, and implementation of decreased pupil-to-teacher ratios, keeping a qualified teacher in every classroom is a continuous challenge. Yet without an adequate supply of qualified teachers and effective professional development, there is little hope of closing the achievement gap. SERVE's strategy to address this challenge includes providing a wide variety of teacher professional development, working with school leaders through academies, identifying and sharing knowledge about higher-quality teaching, and partnering to coordinate and expand knowledge and support to teachers and leaders as they strive to increase student achievement. For example, SERVE partners with the Georgia Department of Education in implementing the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) developed by the Milken Family Foundation, and SERVE works with the Southeast Center for Teacher Quality on a cross-state initiative on teacher supply-and-demand issues and as part of a regional researcher network on teachers and teaching. Montevallo University is a SERVE partner working on the Teachers As Researchers Academy, and SERVE Research Scientists are working with Fordham University on groundbreaking research in superintendent turnover. The A+ Foundation, affiliated with the Alabama Chamber of Commerce, has assumed a major role in our Teacher Dialogue Forums.

**Informing public** *policy* (staff contact: Helen DeCasper). The southeast is arguably the nation's "hotbed" of state-level reform—a testament to the understanding policymakers have of the need for education reform in the southeast. SERVE recognizes that direct support to schools, districts, and communities must be framed in the context of state reform and state reform must be informed by local needs and research-based information. SERVE has several policy-related efforts in place to address these unique needs of its region, including a SERVE senior policy research analyst located in each state education agency and one at-large position serving the region to assist in synthesizing policy and research information, developing policy options, and conducting other policy or legislative analyses as requested. *Policy Briefs* and reports are prepared to address research findings. SERVE supports the development of research-based, objective state education policy through a Policy Network composed of advisors to governors, chief state school officers, state boards of education, legislators, and other key policymakers. SERVE connects Network members through an annual event and the ongoing use of technology.

**Closing the achievement gap through early childhood** (staff contact: Catherine Scott-Little). Early childhood research reinforces a major tenet for closing the achievement gap—get children off to a solid beginning through education; otherwise, at-risk children fall farther behind. SERVE's Ready Children Project will increase the number of children who enter school healthy and ready for success by increasing the quantity and quality of early childhood school readiness programs through research-based training, technical assistance, and other resources for schools, childcare professionals, and parents. Serving young children builds collaborative relationships among the early childhood community to enhance nationwide education efforts for children from birth to age eight. Staff conduct research, write publications, host conferences, provide training, and offer technical assistance to promote sound early childhood policies and practices. Also, an Early Childhood Leadership Institute will be held in partnership with Mississippi State University's Early Childhood Institute.

**Promoting literacy** (staff contact: Paula Egelson). Research emphasizes the foundational role literacy plays in education—reading really is "fundamental" to academic success. SERVE's strategy to address this problem focuses on Mississippi's critical need to improve literacy and involves a partnership with the Mississippi Department of Education, the University of Mississippi, and the Barksdale Foundation. Mississippi school districts are chosen each year to receive training and technical support to incorporate all components of the Mississippi Reading Reform Model. Another 20 districts receive support to incorporate some of the elements. SERVE will evaluate the Initiative and provide yearly reports concerning the status of evaluation activities. SERVE will also assist the Mississippi Department of Education in synthesizing the evaluation findings and providing results of the synthesis to the public. The Center for Educational Research and Evaluation at the University of Mississippi is also a partner in this effort. Another SERVE literacy effort (related to the Barksdale Reading Initiative) is the Family-School Partnership Project designed to assist Mississippi prekindergarten teachers in low-achieving schools to increase parent involvement through family literacy activities. Work will include identifying family literacy best practices, training for cohorts of teachers in low-performing schools, and implementing the program in classrooms.

**Implementing standards, assessment, and accountability** (staff contact: Wendy McColskey ). In the last decade, southeastern states have implemented content standards, testing programs, and accountability mechanisms as primary tools for raising student achievement. However, without significant and coordinated efforts to build district, school, and teacher capacities to organize teaching and learning around higher standards, and to build cultures that use assessment to improve learning, accountability initiatives will not be able to achieve the goal of improved student outcomes for all students. SERVE's commitment to support the capacity building needed to make higher standards in all classrooms a reality includes work at all levels: state, district, school, classroom, and higher education.

At the state level, SERVE is developing procedural knowledge about how to improve state policies. At the district level, SERVE is studying how low-achieving districts respond to state standards, assessment, and accountability influences; developing tools for districts to use in assessing the quality of students' opportunities to learn in classrooms as a tool for school improvement and teacher growth; and supporting a learning community of districts (called SERVE-Leads) committed to developing procedural knowledge about the district role in leading standards-based reform. At the school level, SERVE is developing a template for an eighth grade culminating performance assessment. Its purpose is to focus middle school students on demonstrating competence in the skills needed to succeed in high school. At the classroom level, SERVE is summarizing the emerging

research on "best practices" in classroom assessment and offering assessment skill training to teachers. Finally, SERVE is working with higher education to finalize and scale-up an assessment course for preservice teachers that will help them graduate ready to take on the challenges of standards-based reform in their classrooms.

For teachers to teach to higher standards, they must be held to a more compelling and research-based vision of good teaching than is found in many teacher evaluation systems. Thus, SERVE is field testing and scaling up a teacher evaluation system that will encourage teachers to strive toward higher professional standards.

## National Leadership Area

**Expanded learning opportunities** (staff contact: Catherine Scott-Little). The formal boundaries of school-based education have been expanding for many years. Head Start, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, prekindergarten, and summer school are only a few examples of programs, initiatives, and supplements to the list. SERVE's work in its National Leadership Area is aimed to systematically bring order to this important education issue. As part of its commitment to this national effort, SERVE will conduct an assessment to determine the status of research in the expanded learning field. SERVE's research agenda will take a two-pronged approach. In the area of early childhood education, SERVE is examining the plethora of benchmarks that have been developed for preschool-age children. Results from this research will inform early childhood educators on the skills and characteristics children need to develop to be "ready" for school. The second research study examines indicators of high-quality school-age programming, pulling together current attempts to evaluate expanded learning programs and research on the impact of these programs. Results from this synthesis will provide information to guide schools and other providers as they design and evaluate school-age expanded learning programs. SERVE is also organizing a series of discussion groups, informal symposia, and conferences to promote cross-organizational collaboration and dissemination of research findings in the expanded learning arena.

Along with other key partners, SERVE is developing a plan for coordinated technical assistance to schools. The technical assistance plan will address support for schools and communities to facilitate community collaboration (especially in rural areas or areas that often receive the least help in developing services for children), provide training on the school improvement/school reform knowledge base and implications for quality afterschool and expanded learning programs, encourage collaboration with the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program to assist potential bidders (especially from rural, limited-income, and/or culturally diverse communities) in developing successful proposals, and offer assistance for schools and communities in providing high-quality early education services.

## Key Accomplishments

SERVE has developed products and provided assistance to states, districts, and schools across the region. Among the many successful efforts, two stand out as especially promising to positively impact low-performing schools and to help close the achievement gap. They are:

**Senior Project Program**—In existence since 1994, Senior Project links the development of oral and written communication skills for secondary students and the creation of a culminating assessment for 12th-graders. Students produce a research paper on an approved topic of their choice, develop a related product, and present their findings before a community review panel. Today, over 60 high

schools in the 6 SERVE states participate in the program, and a variety of support is available to southeastern high schools that wish to implement Senior Project. Priority will be given to low-achieving high schools in rural areas. A hotline, electronic billboard, training, annual institute, Senior Project research, and SERVE Senior Project products are available to interested educators. Senior Project sites exist in all SERVE states: Alabama (2), Florida (16), Georgia (3), Mississippi (8), North Carolina (31), and South Carolina (3).

**Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) Program Implementation Study**—SERVE began a 3-year study in 1999–2000 of the progress of CSRD implementation in 38 schools across its 6-state region. The study looks at a purposive sample of 10 percent of all CSRD schools in the southeast that are implementing various self-contained, externally developed, comprehensive school reform models, as well as those integrating components from locally developed approaches. The sample includes urban, suburban, and rural communities. CSRD sites exist in all SERVE states: Alabama (4), Florida (12), Georgia (7), Mississippi (4), North Carolina (6), and South Carolina (5).

## Upcoming Products and Events

**The 2001 SERVE Forum on School Improvement: Sharing Knowledge, Expanding Learning.** The sixth-annual SERVE Forum will convene teachers, administrators, community leaders, and national experts for 3 days of dialogue, instruction, team-building, and sharing *(Fall 2001, Charlotte, North Carolina).*

**Policy Colloquium.** SERVE is cosponsoring with the BellSouth Foundation and the Columbia Group a "Briefing of Southeastern Congressional Delegations on Educational Research," focusing on research conducted by the Rand Corporation on southeastern regional performance and policy implications *(Spring 2001, Washington, DC).*

**Teacher of the Year (TOY) Advisory Committee Meeting.** SERVE biannually convenes current and immediate-past Teachers of the Year from each of the six states as a powerful network and think tank on teaching, learning, and educational policy *(Fall 2001, North Carolina Center for Advancement and Teaching).*

**Tomorrow's Child: Benefiting from Today's Family-School-Community-Business Partnerships.** This *Sharing Success* document provides descriptions of successful family-school-community-business partnerships in early childhood education *(Fall 2001).*

**Building Babies' Brains: A Training for Infant/Toddler Caregivers.** This training guide is designed for presenting understandable brain-based educational research to child caregivers *(Fall 2001).*

**Virtual Libraries in the Southeast: A Guide to Online Databases Available to Educators in the SERVE States.** This Technology in Learning document offers readers information on how to access licensed databases in the southeast *(Fall 2001).*

# Western Regional Education Laboratory at WestEd

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|---|---|
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## Mission

*WestEd, a research, development, and service agency, works with education and other communities to promote excellence, achieve equity, and improve learning for children, youth, and adults.* WestEd's regional educational laboratory brings R&D knowledge and processes to inform policy and strengthen practice in a four-state region. A central goal is to help under-performing schools become places where all children succeed. Laboratory staff develop powerful tools and processes to help bring that transformation about, conduct applied research, and make knowledge and tools widely available through products and partnerships with regional service agencies.

## Regional Problem Areas to be Addressed

Four dimensions identified by regional educators and WestEd's Board of Directors as critical to reform are the focus of work in this 5-year contract:

- Aligned standards-based accountability systems that support effective practices and student achievement;
- School and district leadership that can build high-performing learning communities;
- High quality teachers recruited and supported throughout their careers to reach high levels of accomplishment; and
- Strong communities that support children by strengthening families, schools, and other community institutions.

**Standards-based accountability** (staff contact: Paul Koehler). As the western states strive to put in place standards-based accountability systems focused on results, they encounter many barriers: lack of coherence across state, district, and school practices; poor alignment across standards, assessments, and accountability measures; and inadequate support mechanisms to build the capacity of students, teachers, and administrators to meet the increased expectations. WestEd's work focuses on helping policymakers create coherent systems aligned at state and local levels, and on strengthening the capacity of educators to use that system. WestEd provides expert policy assistance,

a series of Policy Briefs, and tools and processes that promote use of student achievement data to guide school decisionmaking. Partners in the development of data-use tools include the Regional Technology in Education Consortium, the Eisenhower Math-Science Consortium, and local service providers working with low-performing schools such as Utah's Title 1 Distinguished Educators and California's External Evaluators.

**Leadership** (staff contact: Kate Jamentz). Low-performing schools need strong leadership to bring about real change. To be successful, leaders need to learn how to guide school communities in setting common high standards, support teachers to use student work diagnostically to plan instruction, and promote collective action to improve student performance. New forms of distributed leadership are essential. But preparation for these new core competencies is hard to come by. WestEd is working with districts and states to create effective infrastructures that provide high quality professional development for school and district leaders. Tools and strategies for developing core skills, including protocols, facilitator training and video cases, focus on community engagement and guiding standards-based practice. Key partners include the California School Leadership Academy, Nevada's Professional Development Networks, the Student Success Alliance in Utah, and the K–12 Center at Northern Arizona University.

**Teacher quality** (staff contact: Aida Walqui). The western states recognize the critical importance of high-quality teaching and are working to build support for teacher development across a continuum from recruitment through preservice and induction to career-long learning. But teacher shortages and the demands of high-poverty environments often mean that the students who need the most help are in classrooms with underprepared teachers. The need is especially urgent as it relates to one of the fastest growing portions of the student population: students who are not native English speakers and those whose home cultures differ significantly from that of their teachers. WestEd's Teacher Quality Initiative is working with states and teacher education stakeholders to ensure that a coordinated system supports the professional growth of classroom teachers through all stages of their careers. In addition, in partnership with Stanford University and the New Teacher Center, staff are developing multimedia products and processes to help teachers work more effectively with English language learners.

**Strong communities** (staff contact: Beth Ann Berliner). Recent research clearly shows that what's needed to improve student achievement is not limited to what goes on inside the schoolhouse doors and during the customary school day. Educational success requires reversing the effects of poverty by rebuilding neighborhoods into safe, thriving, and desirable places that support families to live, work, raise, and educate their children. In a multiyear innovative effort bringing together the best ideas and practices from school reform, family support, and community building, WestEd will work in partnership with a Community Laboratory site to create a comprehensive approach to support children by strengthening families, schools, and other community institutions. This effort includes developing specific processes to enhance the effectiveness and health of local service agencies and outreach to families.

## National Leadership Area

**Assessment of educational achievement** (staff contact: Stanley Rabinowitz). Major assessment issues confronting policymakers and educators nationwide include: alignment of national, state, and local assessments with content standards, technical adequacy of different forms of assessment, efficiency so that the burden of assessment is distributed across grades and schools, and flexibility and balance across state and local levels. Complementing ongoing work in more than 20 states, WestEd will bring

together quarterly a national group of assessment and accountability specialists identified by state policymakers. In collaboration with this National Assessment Work Group, WestEd will: synthesize what is already known about key topics in a series of Knowledge Briefs, identify the most relevant knowledge gaps and research those gaps, and explore solutions to critical problems. A topic theme will be chosen each year; the focus in year one is high-stakes testing. An Annual Assessment Conference will be cohosted each fall with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment.

## Key Accomplishments

**Guiding standards-based practice.** Working intensively with leadership teams in northern California districts and schools, the Western Assessment Collaborative (WAC) developed a powerful strategy for helping schools and districts really understand and engage in standards-based practice. The strategy proved highly successful in enabling schools to establish performance standards, use classroom and schoolwide assessments to guide teaching and learning, develop new instructional skills, and dramatically increase public engagement in decisions about how to define, measure and improve school quality. Student performance also improved; for example, 89 percent of project schools met California's Academic Performance Index growth targets. This work continues in the Leadership Initiative. To build the capacity of district leaders and principals around the region to effectively implement standards-based practice, additional tools and processes based on WAC's work will be developed and disseminated.

**Data-driven decisionmaking.** Making sense of data and using data to guide planning for school improvement became easier for schools and districts that worked with WestEd in the last contract. From workshops on interpretation of test data to field-testing use of a Quality School Portfolio process developed by Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing as part of their improvement planning, educators found strategies to help them with an urgent need. As accountability requirements increase, and as technology provides new tools for database development and reporting of data, schools need technical help, but even more so, they need to use these technical skills to inform local planning. In the Standards-based Accountability Initiative, staff and partners will build on this earlier work and develop an expanded set of resources to support data use within a framework of inquiry and planning.

## Upcoming Products and Events

**Series of policy briefs** on critical topics published quarterly. *Time & Learning: Making Time Count* published April 2001.

**Series of knowledge briefs** on high-stakes assessment, addressing topics such as intended and unintended effects of high-stakes testing, technical adequacy, and the status of computer-assisted testing, to be published throughout the year.

**Video that shows how teachers can analyze student work** as evidence of what students know and to guide instructional decisions *(Winter 2001).*

**Guide on how to build and sustain effective school leadership teams** that can mobilize the whole school community *(Winter 2001).*

**Regional seminars on critical topics in teacher development.** One of this year's seminars will focus on supply and demand in teacher development, new sectors, and the use of technology *(Spring 2001, San Francisco, California).*

**Regional Superintendents' Institute.** Network meetings for superintendents and leadership teams of urban districts focused on low-performing schools *(Inaugural meeting, Fall 2001).*

**National Assessment Conference** cohosted annually with the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment *(Fall 2001).*